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LEBANON

SUCCESS STORY

New Youth Clubs Connect Communities in the South



OTI/Lebanon

At a ceremony recognizing their community-building efforts, members of three recently established youth clubs sing a patriotic song promoting peace.

“At a time when there was no cooperation among youth, Blue Mission gave us hope that we could revitalize our community with friendship, peace, and collaboration.”

—Fatima, 21, a member of the Maarake youth club

February 2009 – For the past five months, three new youth clubs based in the southern Lebanese villages of Maarake, Toura, and Bazouriyeh have been working together, undertaking new and constructive efforts that many thought were not possible.

In areas where few activities for youths are available, the clubs have coordinated a sports competition for more than 100 participants, facilitated a tree-planting initiative, and organized health-awareness events in partnership with the Palestine Red Crescent Society.

As part of a grant provided by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, Blue Mission, a peace-education organization, provided workshops on leadership, community activism, and conflict resolution for 30 youth “mobilizers” (ages 15–25), who then recruited more than 100 local youths to develop projects to benefit their communities.

“The youth have taken on the responsibility to better their communities together very seriously,” said Hanadi El Bizri, Blue Mission's Director. He added that “they've built a strong network between their villages, including a Facebook group, and are visiting each other all the time.” The project has increased the youths' skills and bolstered their confidence, and the recognition they have received from the communities has, according to one participant, “made us very proud.”

Some community members were initially skeptical, doubting that the young people could accomplish much, but through hard work, the youths managed to leverage land, meeting spaces, equipment, and funding from their municipalities. As a result of the youths' efforts, Toura has a public garden, Bazouriyeh has a clock tower, and Maarake has covered bus stops.

Ali, 24, a youth leader from Toura, said, “Everyone in the village is congratulating us on our efforts. We all want Blue Mission to always be active within our villages.”

The youths' accomplishments were recognized at an event attended by 400 community members, including local mayors. And while the project may have ended, its handiwork lives on, as the clubs are now meeting on their own to plan additional activities for youths from the three villages.